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ABSTRACT

The Ninth Congress of the Inter-American Indian Institute (IAII) was held October 28-November 1, 1985 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and was--for several reasons--a major event in the history of the indigenous people of this hemisphere. First, it was the first Congress held in the United States in the 45 years since the Institute was organized. Second, holding the Congress in New Mexico was an unofficial recognition that the origins of the Institute and Congress are in the Santa Fe- and Taos-based organization of political action to save Pueblo land and water rights in the 1920s. Third, the meeting had a larger contingent of Indian delegates and observers, and Indian participants took a larger role than in the past when non-Indian government representatives controlled the proceedings. Fourth, the emergence of trans-national political power of indigenous people was apparent in the movement to establish a fifth committee consisting of non-governmental Indian delegates as an official component of the Congress. The IAII is recognized as a specialized Inter-American organization of the Organization of American States. Its primary purposes include dissemination of information to its 17 member nations in planning for the economic, social, education, and cultural improvement of Indians throughout the hemisphere. This paper concludes with results of a brief poll concerning the reactions to the Congress of a sampling of people connected with U.S. and Canadian universities. (JHZ)

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The Ninth Inter-American Indian Congress Historical Overview

by William Willard, Ph.D.

"Historical Review of Indian Education, Cultural Policies. U.S. Position," by Henri (etta) Whiteman, Ph.D., and "Contemporary Cultural Revitalization: Bilingual and Bicultural Education," by Beatrice Medicine, Ph.D., are two papers of particular interest to Indian Studies practitioners and are printed here as only two of the presentations of the 1985 Ninth Inter-American Indian Congress. They appear at the conclusion of this historical overview written for W.S.R. by William Willard, Ph.D.

The Ninth Inter-American Indian Congress of the Inter-American Indian Institute was held October 28-November 1, 1985 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a major historic event in the history of the indigenous peoples of this hemisphere for several reasons.

First, the Ninth Congress was the first ***held in the United States*** *in the 45 years since the first Congress was held and the Institute was organized.*

Second, the holding of the Congress in New Mexico was recognition (although never officially stated), that the origins of the Institute and Congress are in the Santa Fe and Taos based organization of political action to save Pueblo land and water rights in the 1920's.

Third, this meeting had a larger contingent of Indian delegates and observers than has been the case in past Congresses. This time the Indian participants took a larger role than in the past when non-Indian government representatives controlled the proceedings.

Fourth, the emergence of trans-national political power of indigenous people was apparent in the movement to establish a fifth committee of the Congress of non-governmental Indian delegates as an official component of the Congress.

The reality behind the Congress is that there is a rapidly increasing Indian population in all Western Hemisphere nations except the Caribbean Island nations without present-time indigenous communities. Another part of the reality is that trans-national immigration, refugee movements, participation in international conferences, and the increasing access to high tech communications, are all contributing to a larger more sophisticated Indian population in the Americas, a population which is becoming more aware of other Indian people, both within and outside any particular national boundary.

Given the increasing awareness of the indigenous presence, the Congress and the Institute become more important than in the past; therefore, the question of "What is this Institute?" is an important question for everyone in the American Indian Studies field.

Inter-American Indian Institute

The Inter-American Indian Institute was established by International Convention (29 November, 1940, 56 Stat. 1303, by Treaty Series, 978). The founding of the Institute came as the result of interest by John Collier, U.S. Commission of Indian Affairs, and the Mexican government to create

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a hemispheric organization which would facilitate inter-governmental cooperation of policies, programs, and general assistance of America's Indian peoples.

The IAII is recognized as a specialized Inter-American organization of the Organization of American States (OAS). Its primary purposes include dissemination of information to member nations in planning for the economic, social, educational, and cultural improvement of Indians throughout the hemisphere. The IAII acts in a consultative and advisory capacity for the various national bureaus/institutes of Indian affairs. Periodically, the IAII offers specialized training programs for professionals, Indian community leaders and others in a variety of community development (agricultural, health, education, etc.).

Four years ago, the General Assembly of the OAS adopted the "Five Year Plan of Indian Action" submitted by the IAII. The Plan contains a diagnostic study of a number of areas in which assistance for the hemisphere's Indian communities can be developed utilizing funding of the IAII in combination with other financial assistance from other sources. The Plan is valuable in adopting short and long term planning strategies, formulating policies and reaching agreements between national agencies and the IAII. Readjustment of the Plan is now taking place, as one result of the Ninth Congress.

The IAII was instrumental in facilitating the negotiations between the National Indian Institute of Mexico, the Bureau of Indian Affairs of the United States, the Native Makai Rights Fund, and representatives of the Kickapoo Tribe of Mexico and the United States which resulted in the passage by the United States Congress of PL 97-420, "Texas Band of Kickapoo Act." In recent months, the IAII was instrumental in mediating a highly sensitive matter involving the incarceration in Mexico of members of the Native American Church. These persons were arrested while attempting to bring to the U.S. controlled substances, used in religious ceremonies by the Native American Church and sanctioned by United States state and federal laws, which had been collected in Mexico. Mexican law does not extend the same recognition of religious rights. Through efforts of the IAII, these members of the Church were released. The IAII has also been involved in an on-going effort to coordinate a meeting of United States and Mexican program agencies to discuss mutual concerns about the border Indian populations. The IAII has a long record of assisting a number of projects which have enabled American Indians from the United States to study in Mexico, and conduct study-tours of programs administered by the Mexican and other governments. It has also sponsored leading scholars on Indian language and cultural studies from Mexico for lectures and program participation in the United States.

Membership in the IAII is comprised of seventeen nations. Canada may become a member. A five member Executive Committee is vested with executive powers of the Institute and meets quarterly to confer with the Director and his staff, whose offices are in Mexico City. Dave Warren, Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico, Principal Representative, and Virginia Murdock, Alternate Representative, Colorado River Tribes, Arizona, serve on the United States delegation. Donald Stewart, U.S. Department of State, acts as liaison to the delegation.

The Congresses are intended to be held every four years in a member nation chosen at the last previous Congress. The host country takes responsibility for organizational expenses for the Congress. Selection of delegates and observers is done within the political processes of each national government with all of the virtues and defects inherent in those selection processes.

The nine Congresses to date have been held in Patzcuaro, Mexico (April 1940), Cuzco, Peru, Guatemala City, Guatemala (May 1959), Quito, Ecuador (October 1964), Patzcuaro, Mexico (April 1968), Brasilia, Brazil (August 1972), Merida, Mexico (November 1980), Santa Fe, United States of America (October 1985), and the tenth is scheduled for Argentina in 1989.

The Congress in Santa Fe was like all such gatherings, a series of dramas in a political theater. Political theater, unfortunately includes closed meetings, events by invitation only, direction by persons not physically at the Congress, secret instructions, all sorts of unknown and unknowable actions and actors.

(The following brief poll concerning reactions to the Congress was conducted by Dr. Willard and several students at WSU. Respondents were taken from a selected sampling of people presently associated with U.S. and Canadian Universities.)

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Question 1: WHAT DO YOU FEEL THE CONGRESS WAS MEANT TO ACCOMPLISH?

Respondent 1: It accomplished what I wanted done, but not the way I expected. It was meant to establish precedent of the rights of the Indian nations.

Respondent 2: We wanted more resolutions approved and wanted to learn about problems in South America.

Respondent 3: The Congress proceeded in accordance with the original precepts of assimilation ideas, but it wasn't an Indian conference at all. It was, instead, a way that the nations who participated in it to solve their "Indian Problems."

Respondent 4: It was meant to accomplish two things: 1) to make possible communication between policy makers as regards to the Indigenous people and 2) to showcase the U.S. since it was the first time held in the U.S.

Respondent 5: I felt the Congress was meant to bring together the delegates. This didn't happen though because the Indians were U.S. appointed and not true representatives of the native cultures.

Respondent 6: It was supposed to be a sort of forum for various groups to raise the issues that they felt strongly about in their countries and enable them to bring public awareness to them.

Respondent 7: It's supposed to cover more agendas, but needed more Indian participation.

Respondent 8: It accomplished what it was set out to accomplish.

Respondent 9: The basic idea was good, but I do not feel that what went on at the Congress is what was intended to be accomplished.

Respondent 10: There was influence of the American delegation on the Latin delegations.

Respondent 11: To compare Indian policies among the various nation states and exchange information.

Question 2: WHAT DO YOU FEEL ARE THE MOST CRITICAL PROBLEMS FACING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE?

Respondent 1: Genocide, especially in Guatemala, Peru, and, occasionally, Ecuador.

Respondent 2: In South America, the Indians are 100 years behind. In Brazil, their lands are being taken and they are being displaced. In the U.S., there is a possibility of losing important Indian autonomy and many reservations are in jeopardy.

Respondent 4: Basic survival in both physical (nutrition, health, etc.) and cultural sovereignty.

Respondent 5: They need to get the governments to recognize and assert the rights of Indians.

Respondent 6: Self determination. The indigenous people need to be able to direct their own lives to find a balance in today's society. They need to get away from the control of the government father figure.

Respondent 7: 1) Survival from areas facing genocide, especially in Peru, Guatemala, and Brazil. 2) Ethnocide, sovereignty, and land base, and all things needed to survive and continue. 3) They need to define their relationship with the national governments. 4) More access to health and education. 5) Relationships between sovereignty and technology have to have communication and solidarity.

Respondent 8: The topics were 1) cultural politics and the Indian population; 2) human rights and the Indian world; 3) development and the Indian population; and 4) Indian movements and organizations. These are the most critical problems.

Question 3: WHAT DO YOU FEEL CAN BE DONE ABOUT THESE PROBLEMS?

Respondent 1: Expose the governments who are practicing genocide enough so that other governments will be frightened and apprehensive towards dealing with them, thus not providing any more help if necessary until the government shapes up. Also, the human rights policy should be more important in effect cleaning up the indigenous policy and giving the Indians a better public image.

Respondent 2: In South America, there should be the establishment of a Human Rights Commission. In the U.S., there should be strong efforts to fend off all assaults on the integrity of reservations of land. They need to back one another to get their message to a large audience.

Respondent 3: Following the basic idea of the Congress, of carrying the indigenous problems into a more world-wide sphere, as in the U.N., the Indians need to stand up to assert their sovereignties, to bring international recognition to themselves, with contact with other native organizations.

Respondent 4: They would best be addressed by a country to country basis. Also, a program to educate the general public would be beneficial. More awareness of native problems and conflicts by people in the areas and communities involved is necessary before any-

thing major can be accomplished.

Respondent 5: It's going to take time and pressure to solve the problems.

Respondent 6: Each country must be responsible for its own efforts. They can't do it for each other. The Congress leaders do not have the ability to try to take on these problems for all of the indigenous people. There are too many differences between them all. For that reason, I recommend that the Canadian government not join this Congress as official members, but rather as observers. It's senseless to become active in an organization that is supposed to be working for the indigenous people, but in reality represents only the governments and not the Indians.

Respondent 7: People should continue to press for joint conferences to come up with a solution. Increase communication to people. Educate the public about all Indians and this education should start early. Conferences and Indian affairs in general need better media coverage. We basically live in an ignorant culture.

Respondent 8: The problems each need to be confronted in the individual countries.

Respondent 10: One way to solve these problems is to publicize the role of Indians.

Respondent 11: Withdraw U.S. support from militaristic regimes and curb power of multinational corporations.

Question 4: ARE THE PROBLEMS FACING THE NATIVE AMERICANS THE SAME ALL OVER THE TWO CONTINENTS?

Respondent 1: Yes, there is no fundamental difference at all. There is a global movement of millions of people who have the same conception of human rights.

Respondent 2: Yes, in general the problems are the same. The dominant society deprives the Indian of land and freedom for economic gain due to an inability to understand indigenous people.

Respondent 3: No, there is much difference in geographic location, historical content, settler states, and, of course, national governments. And overwhelmingly, in both cases, there are no real rights exercised for the indigenous people.

Respondent 4: No, the number of Indians vary greatly between the continents. In South America, people identify a smaller number of total people as 'Indian.'

Respondent 5: No, varies by country.

Respondent 6: No, of course not! Genocide is practiced openly in South America, usually organized by the government; while in North America, it doesn't seem so obvious or publicized.

Respondent 7: No, but there are some similar problems.

Respondent 8: No, each Native American group has unique problems.

Respondent 10: No, the problems, such as poverty, is worse in other countries than in the U.S.

Respondent 11: Yes, to a degree, control of resources, political autonomy, and racism are the major problems.

Question 5: IS THERE UNITY BETWEEN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND, IF NOT, IS THERE A MOVEMENT TOWARDS UNITY?

Respondent 1: There is evolving unity which has become more obvious in the last 18 months. All indigenous committees working for the United Nations are encouraging others to become more involved in their meetings. They feel there is a need to break the North American dominance and get more Latin American Indians involved in the international meetings. In the next three to four years, you will see strengthening and routine relationships.

Respondent 2: No. There is movement towards unity, but there is not enough unity between the indigenous people now. There is too much paternalism of the U.S. Indians over the South American Indians.

Respondent 3: Of course not. Such a thing is difficult to achieve and, in this case, there will never be a 'text book' idea of unity.

Respondent 4: It's just an idealized type theory. The only noticeable area of involvement is in a tribe to tribe basis and, even that, is no more than mutual support.

Respondent 5: No.

Respondent 6: No, and I doubt that there ever will be. That point was made obvious at the Congress. The Indians felt they had no say in what went on and, when the groups pulled away for discussions, the politics of the whole thing was what was most noticeable.

Respondent 7: Some groups are forming, but there is not overall unity and there can't be overall unity because different regions face different problems; for example, genocide and deforestation.

Respondent 8: No, there is always a movement towards unity, but it will never be accomplished.

Respondent 10: No, there is no unity throughout the Americas. In some ways, com-

patibility is opposition of each other.

Respondent 11: Yes. Dramatic strides have been made because Indians can travel more freely in the hemisphere.

Question 6: DO YOU FEEL THAT BASIC QUESTIONS WERE OBSCURED BY ONE OR SOME OF THE OFFICIAL DELEGATIONS?

Respondent 1: Yes, the Americans were preoccupied with Nicaragua. Some of the U.S. government Indian leaders are becoming a serious impediment to Indian unity.

Respondent 2: Yes, they were obscured so much by most of the delegations that I didn't want to listen anymore.

Respondent 3: Yes, all delegates were placed in positions of obscuring those ideas from the first sentence of the Congress. They just talked in circles. What's the sense of having meetings like this when we do not discuss or address important issues like genocide in South America.

Respondent 4: Yes, in the majority of cases when the delegates spoke, they were simply spreading propaganda for their countries. Too many of the official delegates were not native people but bureaucrats sent by their governments to make the governments look good.

Respondent 5: Yes.

Respondent 6: Yes, it wasn't always clear what exactly was going on. I don't see that they accomplished anything notable in any of those areas. It was more of a show and tell for the participating governments.

Respondent 7: Yes, there are two different perspectives: 1) the government knows the basic problems and is covering them up; and 2) the delegates believe that the government is really trying to help, but they are all talk and not much action.

Respondent 8: Yes, by all, they all had their own agenda that they wanted to discuss.

Respondent 10: Yes, there were objections to Human Rights and the interaction between the two groups was formal and informal.

Respondent 11: All official delegations denied the sovereignty of indigenous peoples and, thus, distorted discussions on all issues concerning human rights, economic development, etc.

Question 7: ARE THE INDIAN SPECIALISTS WITH THE DELEGATIONS ACCOMPLISHING ANYTHING FOR THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE BY ATTENDING THESE CONFERENCES?

Respondent 1: No, although they thought highly of themselves, they didn't accomplish anything of significance.

Respondent 2: Yes, the more publicity given towards these problems helps to give hope to the Indians. It is very important to have a good representative.

Respondent 3: The only thing it could accomplish to serve the Indian people, is to help expose the cover-ups of such issues as genocide in South America, and give it more publicity, the cover-ups.

Respondent 4: They could, but I don't say whether they did or not. I didn't observe it at this Congress.

Respondent 5: No.

Respondent 6: No, I don't believe in that idea anyway. We shouldn't have bureaucratic officials determining what the Indian's direction should be.

Respondent 7: Yes, the people are being more enlightened because of them being there; ability for more contact with indigenous people and there may eventually be a positive aspect.

Respondent 8: Indian Specialists went for their own self enhancement.

Respondent 10: Yes, it provides useful role models.

Respondent 11: It depends on how much attention a government pays to its specialists. Often, this is a function of the economic situation at home. In bad times, any programs for Indians are cut.

Question 8: DO YOU FEEL THAT ANY PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS ARE DEVELOPED AT THESE CONFERENCES TOWARD SOLVING INDIAN PROBLEMS?

Respondent 1: No, on the international level, a change is needed in the attitude and working relationship toward the Indians.

Respondent 2:

Respondent 3: Only the 'object of process' to dismantle the idea that the Indians are the problem. It serves to solve that problem by getting rid of the Indians all together.

Respondent 4: Sharing of information. If there could be a central resource center available with information to all groups, it would help.

Respondent 5: No.

Respondent 6: If anything, they may raise the consciousness level, but that doesn't really solve anything.

Respondent 7: No, not officially but informally, these conferences bring about the seeds of ideas. The Indians gain better knowl-

edge of each other.

Respondent 8: Yes, some papers were written there were quite realistic toward all American Indians.

Respondent 10: Nothing really substantial to the human rights problem was solved.

Respondent 11: Very few solutions solved. Nation states do what they want to do to their populations, especially in Militaristic societies.

Question 9: DO YOU FEEL THAT THESE CONFERENCES ARE EXPLOITED AS A WAY TO SPREAD PROPAGANDA?

Respondent 1: Yes, all governments try to look good and these conferences just make it easier for them.

Respondent 2: Yes, this was the intent of the government but in actuality it backfired. The exploration caused the indigenous people to be dramatic.

Respondent 3: Of course.

Respondent 4: I saw that there was too much at this one, but I can't specify, since this is the only Congress I've attended.

Respondent 5: Yes.

Respondent 6: Yes, probably.

Respondent 7: Yes, it is transparent.

Respondent 8: Yes, they always are by all groups.

Respondent 10: Yes, professional propaganda is exploited.

Respondent 11: They give the illusion or hold out the possibility of change but they reinforce the status quo.

Question 10: DO YOU FEEL THAT THE FIFTH COMMITTEE SHOULD BE ADDED TO THE CONGRESS?

Respondent 1: Yes, this is a minimal requirement as it is the only way to give the Indian a voice.

Respondent 2: Yes, the Congress is meaningless without the fifth committee.

Respondent 3: Yes, that would be an excellent interim step. The fifth committee, in actuality, should be the damned Congress.

Respondent 4: Yes, of course.

Respondent 5: Yes.

Respondent 6: Yes, it should be proposed. The effort would help.

Respondent 7: No, they need to restructure the groups they've got so that all Indians get an equal part, but I don't want a fifth committee.

Respondent 8: No, because it is very disorganized as shown by their attempts to speak at the Congress.

Respondent 10: No, the American delegation is appropriately represented and there is not a real need for the fifth committee.

Respondent 11: Yes.

Question 11: DO YOU FEEL THAT GOVERNMENTS PARTICIPATE IN THESE CONGRESSES ON THE PRETENSE THAT INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS WOULD ACCUSE THEM OF FAILING TO FULFILL THEIR OBLIGATIONS TO INDIANS?

Respondent 1: No, they never have in the past because Indians were not present, but now that Indians are present, the government will know to be better prepared.

Respondent 2: Yes, in a way it is an opportunity for the government to defend themselves.

Respondent 3: No, not exactly. They need to attend these congresses, not to help their native people, but to share notes and resources in eliminating the Indians, to act as if they are trying to solve problems.

Respondent 4: Maybe one reason, in that it's more for international relationships from an outside view, to help their governments look better.

Respondent 5: Yes.

Respondent 6: No, I doubt whether they talk to the Indians at all. I don't think the governments worry about 'sensitivity.'

Respondent 7: Yes, to bolster public relations and to upgrade the image of their work. When asked, too many Indians, they would not speak. They would get up and say a little and then introduce their delegates to speak for them.

Respondent 8: Yes, the government uses it as a big show, but it is actually false. They are just there to look like they are doing something.

Respondent 10: No, the government has been involved in these conferences for a long time. It is just part of their obligation to send Indians.

Respondent 11: Yes, in part.

Question 12: DO YOU THINK THAT DISCONTENT AMONG INDIANS OF ANY ONE NATION IS CONTAGIOUS ENOUGH TO INFLUENCE THE OPINIONS/ACTIONS OF OTHER NATIVE INDIGENOUS GROUPS IN OTHER AMERICAN NATIONS?

Respondent 1: Yes, there is a lot of information flowing over the borders between different indigenous groups. The Latin American Indians are very much opposed to the arrogance of the U.S. Indians, thus pooling

their knowledge on how to manipulate the government.

Respondent 2: Yes, discontent among Indians of any one nation is definitely contagious enough to influence the actions of other native indigenous groups.

Respondent 3: No, there is no need to look elsewhere for discontent. It's universal, what is contagious, is the idea to stand up to recover from the consequences. Groups realize that they're not alone, and the idea is effective resistance, which is communicated as an illness.

Respondent 4: Yes, the U.S. being a good example. The U.S. native movements have had a definite impact on the natives in Canada.

Respondent 5: Yes, but only in the U.S.

Respondent 6: No, each area has its own problems. It is not contagious.

Respondent 7: Yes, as communication increases, shared issues and concerns will develop patterns that will be obvious to the government, but this will not help social problems.

Respondent 8: No, because for example, in Central America only the delegates and the government are the ones who are speaking. The main part of the community is not aware of what is going on. The government only presents segments of the problems.

Respondent 10: Yes, this can be seen through the results of committee interaction, between different groups of Indians.

Respondent 11: Yes, there is already a great deal of transference between Canada and the U.S.

The official reports on the Congress can be requested from:

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